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Letter dated 7 March 2001 from the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People addressed to the Secretary-General*

In my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I should like to draw your attention, as a matter of urgency, to the present alarming situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem.

The Committee has been greatly worried about the continuing violence on the ground and the use of deadly force by the Israeli army and security forces, which by some accounts, has led to over 350 Palestinian deaths. According to media reports, Israel continues to rely on the use of massive armed response to individual outbreaks of Palestinian protest throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Since September 2000, some 12,000 Palestinians have been injured in confrontations with the Israeli forces and settlers. Also, our Committee wishes to join the rest of the international community in its indignation over the Israeli practice of extrajudicial killings by Israeli security forces of the members of the Palestinian leadership and other Palestinian officials. This policy is contrary to the rule of international law; it provokes further violence, leads to a crisis of trust and confidence between the two sides and creates new obstacles to peace. The Committee is of the view that, with the situation continuing to deteriorate, the international community should act by stepping up its efforts to ensure protection of the Palestinian people. We also strongly believe that the status quo is absolutely untenable and is firmly rooted in Israel's continued violation of the principles of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, and the provisions of relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. By these actions, Israel has clearly demonstrated its unwillingness to respect the bilateral agreements and understandings reached to date.

The Committee views with particular concern the dangerously rapid disintegration of the Palestinian economy as a result of various restrictive policies of the Government of Israel. Protracted closures of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, tight restriction on the movement of people and goods, customs and tax income withholding and other measures of collective punishment have had a

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disastrous effect on the Palestinian economy as a whole, as well as on individual Palestinian households. Jobs and markets in Israel have become inaccessible, tourists have stayed away because of the violence, food crops have been razed and fields have been blocked out of reach. The Palestinians have been forced to revert to a day-to-day struggle for their survival, rather than work for long-term development and prosperity. Infrastructure built or renovated with a lot of effort and with invaluable assistance from the international donor community has been damaged and development projects have had to be abandoned or frozen indefinitely. These are the conditions to which the Palestinians are being forced to resign themselves until stability is restored and peace is achieved.

The recent reports by the office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories have also raised concern over the impending fiscal crisis of the Palestinian Authority and its capacity to continue to function. We fully share the view that the fiscal situation of the Palestinian Authority should be at the top of the agenda of the international community.

Alarmed by the catastrophic state of the Palestinian economy and by the social and economic impact of the continuing conflict and the policy of closures, our Committee decided to convene the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People. The event took place on 20 and 21 February 2001, at the United Nations Office at Vienna. The purpose of the Seminar was to examine the state of the economy, review efforts by Member States and intergovernmental and civil society organizations aimed at alleviating the current humanitarian emergency and to mobilize greater support for the attainment of the legitimate economic rights of the Palestinian people, thus contributing to the broader peace-building efforts in the region.

The participants in the Seminar acknowledged the need for an intensified provision of humanitarian assistance by the international donor community in order to meet the emergency needs of the Palestinian people. The donors were called upon to disburse, on an urgent basis, the necessary funds to address the serious fiscal crisis of the Palestinian Authority. The Seminar also called on the Occupying Power to abide by its obligations under international law and to immediately terminate its measures of collective punishment that have caused the tragic loss of human life and serious destruction of Palestinian property, livelihood and infrastructure.

In the light of the above, the Committee wishes to reiterate its position of principle that the United Nations should continue to exercise its permanent responsibility towards all the aspects of the question of Palestine until it is resolved in a satisfactory manner, in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions and in accordance with norms of international law, and until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are fully realized. We believe that the United Nations family should continue to render various forms of assistance to the Palestinian people. In the present circumstances, the efforts of the office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories acquire special significance.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 41.

Ibra Deguène **Ka**
Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the
Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People